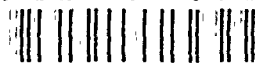


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THE SINGLE SOLDIER DILEMMA

BY

Lieutenant Colonel Theodore C. Fox III
United States Army

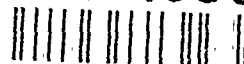
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THE SINGLE SOLDIER DILEMMA

AN INDIVIDUAL STUDY PROJECT

By

Lieutenant Colonel Theodore C. Fox III
United States Army

Colonel John F. Nau Jr.
Project Adviser



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	ii
Introduction	1
Purpose	1
Definition of Issue	1
Interest Groups Defined	3
Historical Background	4
Early Years of the Republic	5
Turn of the Century	5
Impact of World War II	6
Large Standing Peacetime Army	7
Demographics Begin Reversal	7
The Partnership Begins	9
Single Frustrations Publicized	11
Actions to Defuze the Issue	12
Follow-on Reactions	13
Literature Review	15
Quality of Life	16
Compensation	18
Other Soldier Policies	19
Discussion	20
Community Life Activities	21
Compensation	23
Other Soldier Policies	26
Conclusions	27
Recommendations Summary	28
Endnotes	33
Selected Bibliography	36

ABSTRACT

This study examines the allegation that there is discrimination against single soldiers in favor of their married counterparts in terms of quality of life, compensation, and barracks and inspection policies. The issues involved in this study are emotional with perceptions and facts often at variance. The scope of research includes; (1) investigation into both historical and present causes of single soldier frustrations and alleged inequities, (2) analysis of Army policies and programs impacting on both married and single soldiers, (3) review of Army survey results to glean singles' perceptions and feelings of current programs afforded them, (4) analysis of other research and study data pertaining to single and married soldier issues, (5) in-depth interviews with key Department of Defense policy and program personnel and (6) examination of actions taken by the Army to defuse singles' issues and their follow-on reactions. The paper concludes that while progress has been made in many areas of single soldier inequity, there still is an absence of Department of the Army strategic planning and vision for single soldier policies and programs. Recommendations are provided which attempt to answer this dilemma in terms of a viable proponency, accurate informed forum and symposium representation, necessary broad policy guidance, compensation reform, and leadership education.

INTRODUCTION

Purpose....

The purpose of this paper is to determine if there is discrimination in favor of married soldiers (perceived or real) over single soldiers, and if so, what are the major repercussions (early marriage), and what measures should be taken to adjust Army policies and programs.

Issue Definition....

Throughout most our nation's history, we have had a single Army. However, since the all-volunteer force began in the early 1970s, the percentage of married service members has grown making housing, health care and other quality of life programs increasingly important to entice members to reenlist and serve full careers. This has prompted the Army to bring greater focus and attention to personnel policies and programs oriented toward the married soldier and his family.

However, in recent years, single soldiers have expressed a growing frustration that their married counterparts are getting a "better deal" and that singles are being discriminated against. They increasingly voice the opinion that they are the forgotten and unfairly burdened "new minority" in the military.¹ Many of these deep seated frustrations are expressed in responses to military news editorials as well as formal and informal soldier forums. Some cite the numerous family member programs that have

been funded by the services as but one example of favoritism. They further allege that these family programs are heavily publicized with little or no emphasis given to single soldier needs. Others complain of marrieds' versus singles' inequities in assignment and billeting regulations, pay and allowances, and inspection policies. While they admit that some improvements have taken place, a feeling persists that these improvements are insignificant in comparison to the programs and benefits available to married soldiers.

This perception of discrimination is not limited to only military enlisted ranks but is also becoming a growing concern among senior service leaders and defense analysts. Some question whether the pendulum has in fact swung too far in favor of the married soldier. They acknowledge that the military has two distinct sets of policies, those which apply to married soldiers and those pertaining to single soldiers.

One specific example of preferential treatment often cited by critics is the married soldiers' housing allowance. They feel it is unjust because of the larger percentage a married member receives, even though he or she is at the same pay grade and experience level of the single member. Lee Mairs, an analyst and economist for military pay issues, stated during an April 1990 Air Force Times interview,

"Right now we have all these subsidies for married folks, and single guys are discriminated against. If I did that in my company, I'd probably face an equal opportunity lawsuit."²

But defenders of the current system say higher allowances for members with dependents is appropriate because this recognizes family life as part of the military lifestyle.³ This area will be covered in greater detail later.

There are dangers if these perceptions or realities are left unchecked. First, there is a potential for seriously undermining morale as well as adversely impacting on enlistment and retention of quality soldiers now and in the future. Second, it has the potential to impede development of commitment and cohesiveness that are essential to combat effectiveness. This is particularly distressing when you consider that nearly 368,000 single men and women serve in the active Army today.⁴ In a time of major changes in the U.S. Army, quality soldiers are the key to maintaining our ability to execute our national military objectives.

Interest Groups Defined....

In order to permit trend analysis, statistical comparisons will be confined to soldiers who are single and without dependents versus married soldiers with and without children. Comparisons will also consider variables such as location (residing on and off the post or installation) and rank. This study's focus will be primarily on those enlisted grades E1 through E4. Officer personnel will not be considered due to lack of significant demographic change and smaller make-up of the total Army population. A study shortfall will be the lack of

adequate attention to those single soldiers who are committed but not married. A recent study (Army Research Institute 1991) has shown that their attitudes vary to some degree from those singles who can be categorized as "independent."⁵ Because of the complexity and depth of involvement for understanding, it is not within the scope of this paper to address this subject in the detail it deserves. Based on study findings, it will be assumed that single soldier relationships act to improve use of and attitudes toward quality of life programs and policies.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

In order to comprehend the single soldier issue and competing agendas, we must first have an understanding of the evolution of the philosophy (values and attitudes) and commitment of the Army as an institution toward Army families; an institution that prides itself in "taking care of its own." To accomplish this, we will look into Army philosophy and attitudes toward the family from a historical perspective. We will then gain an understanding of how that philosophy was manifested in regulations, policies and public law. By doing so, we will be able to see clearly the beginnings and causes of single soldier frustrations and allegations of discrimination in favor of their married counterparts. Having established this backdrop of understanding, we will conclude this section with the system's responses to date on single soldier issues (quality of life, compensation, and other Army soldier policies) and the follow-on

reactions to those responses.

Early Years of the Republic....

Army enlisted ranks were predominately single prior to the end of the draft in the late 1960s and beginning of the All-Volunteer Army in the early 1970s. This had been the case since the early days of the republic when there was a conspicuous lack of any reference to family issues in formal regulations. This attitude continued even as wives and children followed their husbands and fathers across the West. The only regulation which could be interpreted as recognition of their presence concerned the status of "camp followers" and gave post commanders complete authority over civilians. During this period, the Army assumed that enlisted men never married, but recognized that many officers and senior noncommissioned officers did.⁶ However, this one sided recognition remained informal at best. For the most part, policies and regulations were oriented on a single Army.

Turn of the Century....

Beginning with the dawn of the twentieth century, the Army began to acknowledge the obligation to provide for basic family needs in certain areas, but limited eligibility to families of officers and senior noncommissioned officers. The Army still considered families of enlisted men below noncommissioned rank an unwanted burden. Until 1942, Army regulations prohibited the

peacetime enlistment or reenlistment of men with wives and minor children.⁷

Impact of World War II....

A new civilian Army began in 1940 as a result of the enactment of the Selective Training and Service Act.⁸ As the Army entered into World War II, it was unprepared to assist young soldiers and their families experiencing problems of adjustment, financial difficulties, separation and other emotional burdens. The Army dealt with these problems informally through post funds, local charitable organizations, and the American Red Cross. However, even the Red Cross with its expanded operations could not muster sufficient resources to meet the tremendous needs for assistance. This generated the need for a "home team" that Army members could turn to for help without having to go to what many felt was public charity. As a result, the Secretary of War directed the establishment of the Army Emergency Relief (AER) on 5 February 1942. The purpose of this newly formed organization was to collect and administer funds to take care of those Army members and families who were in need. Following World War II, AER continued as a private, nonprofit organization providing assistance to soldiers and their families.⁹

As the country moved into the Cold War period, the Army was unable to turn back the clock by reverting to policies focused on a single Army, especially with greater numbers marrying in the enlisted ranks. The war years had ushered in programs and

policies that had come to be not only institutionalized but expected by the married population. With the need for a large standing Army to preserve peace during the Cold War years, acceptance of families became an increasing necessity for soldier retention.

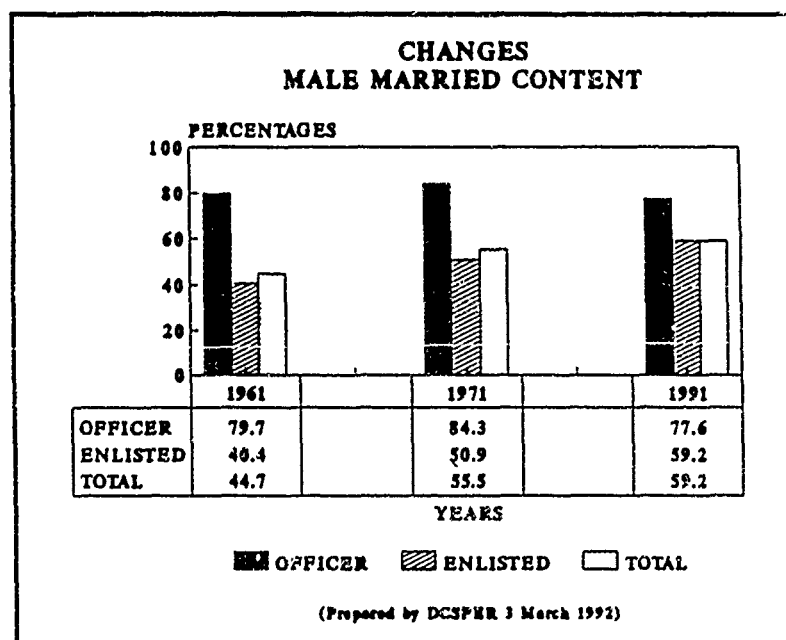
Large Standing Peacetime Army....

The existence of a large military population and its growing family numbers led to the establishment in 1965 of an overall umbrella organization for family services - The Army Community Service Program (ACS) Program. In addition, the Civilian Health and Medical Program of the Uniformed Services (CHAMPUS) was created in 1966 to provide for military families health care while stationed at locations away from military treatment facilities. Both of these programs were monumental steps in formalizing action and galvanizing support for the family. However, at this point there still was not a consistent as well as focused philosophy toward Army families and their support.¹⁰

Demographics Begin Reversal....

The Army's evolution from a draft Army to an All Volunteer Army in the early 1970s brought about further change in philosophy, values and attitudes, particularly toward an increasing married population. The Army's leadership was forced to approach military personnel policies from a fresh and

unfamiliar perspective, particularly concerning enlisted ranks. The Army was now quickly becoming a force of more married versus single soldiers. Concern with retention rates and with military family quality of life as one major factor in retention decisions, led to an acceleration of activity in military family quality of life programming.¹¹ According to research provided by the Army Research Institute, approximately one-third of the factors which affect commitment to the Army as a way of life and the intent to reenlist come directly from family factors.¹² Leaders began to recognize that although the Army recruited individuals it retained families.¹³ For example, in 1980 over half the Army active duty force was married, compared to less than 30 percent thirty years prior.¹⁴ Nearly all increases had taken place in the enlisted ranks as shown in the chart below.



This change in demographic composition brought with it a demand

from Army families for improved family and "quality of life" programs.¹⁵ This demand, with an agenda of needs aimed directly at the Army leadership, reached its zenith in the decade of the 80's.

The Partnership Begins....

One of the first "institutionalized steps" toward an advocacy for the family was the establishment of the Family Liaison Office (FLO) by the Army Chief of Staff in 1981. Its charter was and continues to be that of providing advice to key policy makers and facilitating coordination between Army staff elements concerning family policy and programs.¹⁶

During the early 80's, the Army leadership also realized that there was an institutional obligation to articulate a philosophy for its families. This was brought about not only by the change in family demographics but also by concerns that family needs, if unmet, would have the potential to reduce soldiers' readiness, retention, and overall well-being.¹⁷ This philosophy was officially announced in the U.S. Army Chief of Staff White Paper in 1983. This paper acknowledged that the Army as a institution had a moral and ethical obligation to those who serve and their families and that they, correspondingly, had responsibilities to the Army. This relationship created a partnership based on human behavior and Army traditions that blend the responsibility of each individual for his/her own welfare and the obligation of the society to its members.¹⁸ The

White Paper was the benchmark in formalizing Army commitment to the family as well as initiating development and implementation of policies and programs aimed at promoting partnership - most of which had little impact or bearing on the single soldier.

In response to the Army's commitment to families, the Family Action Plan Planning Conference (FAPPC) was formerly instituted in 1983 corresponding to and following a 1980 grassroots level program initiated by Army spouses in Washington D.C.¹⁹ This program was to institutionalize a process that Army families could use to resolve issues through local forums at the installation, post or community level. Issues that could not be resolved at those levels would be elevated to the appropriate command level for resolution. Unfortunately, these forums were designed around the needs of married members with a conspicuous absence of single soldier representation or concern.

Because of the growing number and diversity of family oriented programs created in the early 80's, there was a need for central coordination and oversight of these programs at Department of the Army level. In 1984 the Army Community Family Support Center (CFSC) was established to provide one central administrative structure for the Army's "quality of life" and family support programs.²⁰ This was also the year officially declared by the Department of the Army as the "Year of the Family." As a result of the stigma associated with the publicity and heightened emphasis given to married soldiers and their families, single soldier frustration began to swell in the mid-

1980s.

Single Soldier Frustrations Publicized....

Although there had been complaints raised through the chain of command and informal/formal soldier forums concerning perceived inequities, a sense of urgency to do anything about them was lacking from the senior leadership. However, action was taken in the Department of the Army Circular 608-86-1 (The Army Family Action Plan III) in May 1986 to add the statement that the "year of the family expanded the scope of the Army Family to include single soldiers."²¹

It was not until a series of letters to the Military Times editor regarding single soldiers' issues was published in a 7 March 1988 issue of Army Times that the issue received senior leadership interest. The article was based on input from over 130 letters concerning how singles felt about being single in today's military.²² A few of the issues included: barracks life, extra duty and holiday duty, assignments (unfair advantages to married service members; singles getting more unpopular temporary duties, more isolated duty stations with fewer facilities), inequitable household goods weight allowances, and economic disadvantages, especially in the area of housing allowances.²³ A large part of this frustration was driven by a loss of confidence by single soldiers in members of the chain of command and a sense of not having an identifiable single soldier proponent.²⁴

Actions to Defuse the Issue....

As a result of the senior leaderships' heightened awareness, the Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Personnel (DCSPER) along with the Office of the Inspector General (OTIG) were tasked by the Chief of Staff of the Army (CSA) to inquire into the validity of the articles. They were also directed to look for the causes of the inequities and perceptions of unfair treatment. Both offices concurred that the articles were generally accurate and that emphasis on "the family" had overshadowed the single soldier. The OTIG also found that single soldiers' perceptions of barracks life were driven by chain of command sensitivity.²⁵ As a result of these and other observations, the CFSC was directed in July 1988 to develop an action plan which would help to ensure that single soldiers and families were treated equally. An outgrowth of that tasking and results from the Family Action Plan Planning Symposium of 1988 was the establishment of the Better Opportunities for Single Soldiers (BOSS) program in June 1989. The thrust of this world-wide program was originally targeted at recreational opportunities and programming for singles; its purpose being to provide a vehicle for input and feedback between the single and unaccompanied soldier, the installation staff, and the local command. In October 1990, the CSA directed that the BOSS program's scope be expanded and focus redirected to include every aspect of the single soldier's life.

During the same 1989 period, another forum called the Soldier Issue Forum was established by the CSA to deal with

issues impacting on readiness, retention, and well being of soldiers and their families. Its format was designed to get issues in front of the CSA quickly for a more timely resolution than expected from other issue platforms - issues considered were generated by the Army Staff. Although this committee has obvious advantages of expediency in identifying, staffing, and recommending courses of action directly to the CSA for consideration, it was not a "user friendly conduit" for single soldier problems due to membership composition and diversity of topics seldom targeted specifically at single soldier issues.

Follow-on Reactions....

At the close of the decade, the single soldier now had three institutionalized mechanisms, other than the news media, for bringing alleged discrimination and inequities to Army leadership attention. These were the chain of command, the Army Family Action Plan Planning Symposium and the BOSS program forum. While the symposiums and forums have been successful to a degree, problems continue to exist in terms of equitable representation, unbiased proponency, and "user friendly" information conduits.

As one example, although there are many groups in the Family Action Plan Planning Committee symposium with diverse and divergent agendas, each has had at one time or another enjoyed a fuller representation than the single soldier ever has. In the 1991 symposium, of approximately 150 delegates participating, only 18 were single soldiers.²⁶ This same representation

approximates the 1989 and 1990 symposiums also. If the intent is to provide an equitable and fair representation of the "Total Army Family," then single soldier attendance is far below their fair share of 44 percent of the Army strength. Additionally, at the end of the 1991 FAPPC symposium, a total of 315 issues over an eight year period have been submitted to the senior Army leadership for resolution. Approximately 50 percent of those issues have dealt exclusively with family issues while less than 3 percent pertained to strictly single soldier concerns. The remainder fall in areas that can be considered either "mutually supporting for both groups" or "other categories" such as civilian or reserve component issues. With this past track record, this symposium's utility for true single soldier proponency is questionable at best.²⁷

Turning to the BOSS program, success hinges on several factors; (1) funding, (2) support by the chain of command, (3) commitment of the installation staff and (4) interest and belief by the soldier that the program will work. If any one of these four components fail, the program at the installation fails. Although the BOSS program provides a conduit for the single soldier voice, its feedback is retained at the local level for action and resolution.²⁸ Therefore, when the program is not supported by the commander, this causes the BOSS committee members to lose interest resulting in potential doom for the program. This scenario has necessitated "jump starts" to get the program on track at various locations. There is no formalized

information channel through Major Commands (MACOMs) to DA other than informal after action reports to retain any semblance of issue visibility. The bottom line is that issues can be held "hostage" at the local level with promises of action, selective support, or complete inaction.

As long as the current DA policy of voluntary participation is encouraged versus directed, program success will remain inconsistent.

The success or failure of these programs have been documented by a body of literature created over a period of years using surveys and research analyses. The next step is a literature review of the Army's efforts to gage program and policy affects by use of survey instruments and research analyses.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this section, we will review the main body of research literature along with appropriate Department of Defense regulations, circulars and pamphlets dealing with single soldier and family member policies and programs. Analysis will be further refined by interviews with key Department of Defense policy and program personnel who deal daily with soldier and family issues.

Quality of Life....

According to Department of the Army Pamphlet 600-19, quality of life is a broad concept that satisfies the common human needs of an individual or family are satisfied and includes a collective body of policies, programs, and actions. Quality of life in the Army includes both living conditions and duty environment. Living conditions can be further broken down into pay and compensation, health care, housing, education, services, and community life activities. Duty environment addresses the areas of duty facilities, duty requirements, military skill training, personnel utilization, and organizational climate. For the purpose of this paper and to provide a clearer focus in line with actual soldier discrimination allegations, quality of life will be oriented primarily toward community life activities (morale, welfare, and recreation programs). This type of community support is particularly important in an environment that requires individuals to adapt frequently to new circumstances and where work requirements may cause personal and relational stress.²⁹ Pay and compensation because of the complexity of the subject will be covered as a separate topic. Duty facilities (billets when pertaining to the single soldier) and duty requirements and personnel utilization, will be covered under the broad umbrella topic of Other Soldier Policies. The remaining categories mentioned will not be addressed due to the absence of any significant alleged discrimination.

There have been several key studies and surveys that provide

insight into single soldier perceptions of their treatment versus that of their married peers in Army quality of life programs. The Walter Reed Institute of Research gathered and analyzed data that showed that the overwhelming majority of single soldiers do not see family programs as competing for resources that actively affect their quality of life.³⁰ In fact, many expressed strong support of the benefits married soldiers receive as a partial recompense for the greater deprivations that their married peers undergo.³¹ This finding was further collaborated by the results from a 1988 Sample Survey of Military Personnel (enlisted personnel) by the U.S. Army Soldier Support Center. This survey sampled approximately 5 percent of the U.S. Army enlisted strength with a response from approximately 12,000; of this, approximately 36 percent reported that they were single. This instrument found that the majority of the single soldiers surveyed agreed that the Army's recent emphasis on family programs and improvement of quality of life benefitted them also.³² They also agreed that the Army was trying to improve the overall quality of life for single soldiers.³³ In addition, the Office of the Inspector General by analyzing results from sensing sessions and requests for assistance found that Morale, Welfare and Recreation (MWR) programs were not a major concern of single soldiers. They further found that single soldiers felt facilities were available to all and not specifically directed at only family use.³⁴ The one dichotomy to the aforementioned was brought out in a review of comments provided by single soldier

panel members of BOSS program forums. A recurring complaint at these forums was that morale, welfare, and recreation activities were geared toward families.³⁵ They further voiced complaints that their chain of command did not listen to their problems or were not sympathetic to their needs. According to BOSS program coordination personnel, the success of the program on any particular installation or post was dependent not only on local leadership receptiveness to input but also the single soldiers confidence and interest in the program.³⁶

Compensation....

A review of the DoD Military Compensation Background Papers showed that compensation involving a number of allowances was based on marital/dependency status. Obvious examples identified were Basic Allowance for Quarters (BAQ), Variable Housing Allowance (VHA), Overseas Housing Allowance (OHA), Cost-of-Living Allowance (COLA), and Permanent Change of Station Allowance. Family Separation Allowance was allowed for unaccompanied soldiers with dependents, but not authorized for single soldiers. In addition, DoD military pay compensation charts based on pay records further highlighted the disparity between single and married soldiers. On the average, the total basic pay and allowances for an enlisted soldier with family members was 3.9 to 12.9 percent higher than that for a single soldier at the same pay grade and experience level. Members of the Seventh Quadrennial Review of Military Compensation Commission, a

Presidential appointed committee tasked to review a wide range of pay issues, stated during a interview that there are no plans to modify the current dependency based allowance system either now or in the immediate future.

Review of 1992 military pay charts indicate that pay equity for all members at a given pay-grade and experience level exists only for basic pay and subsistence allowances.

Other Soldier Policies....

This area not only had the most accessible information but also the most controversial from the single soldiers' point of view. For the purpose of this study, consideration of soldier policies were limited to barracks policies, inspection policies and extra/after duty requirements. Three major studies and several surveys have delved into the alleged inequities in this area. In the previously referenced Walter Reed Army Institute survey analysis, the major source of single soldier discontent came from life in the billets and policies and programs associated with billets life. The married soldier was envied because of his or her ability to escape the unit after the duty day and on weekends. In garrison, the single soldier felt that there should be an equally defined off duty boundary between his private world and the "Army" as that enjoyed by his married peer.³⁷ Many complaints concerned the married soldier not being subjected to barracks inspections or "hey you" weekend or after duty work requirements. An overwhelming number also expressed

concern that barracks room inspection policies were inconsistent even within units of the same organization.³⁸ Results from the analysis of a second study carried out by the U.S. Army Research Institute confirmed many of the same findings made by the Walter Reed study.³⁹ Single enlisted soldiers reported being called back for extra details considerably more often than their married peers. They also were more likely than married counterparts to report excessive non-job activities. In sum, most perceived work rules and regulations least favorable to their group.⁴⁰

A third study conducted by the U.S. Army, Europe and Seventh Army also substantiated that single soldiers are treated differently in a variety of areas from their married counterparts. As a bold step forward, the command issued guidance to the field on proposals of how to enhance single soldier well-being. In this guidance, commanders at all levels are directed to use equality and "what makes sense" as tests for implementing the proposals.⁴¹

DISCUSSION

In this section, the literature review will be used as a point of departure for further examination and analysis of the three major topic areas of single soldier inequities. As stated previously, quality of life issues will be oriented primarily toward community life activities (morale, welfare, and recreation programs). The first to be addressed is that of community life activities.

Community life Activities....

As outlined in the literature review, all available studies and analysis of survey results to include Army inspector general analysis concerning quality of life discrimination do not collaborate the views expressed by single soldiers in the 1988 Army Times article or those expressions of inequity expressed during BOSS forums. The perceptions of inequity may tend to be overstated in severity due to the method of direct solicitation used by the paper. This type of editorial solicitation often invites negative responses. In other words, only those few who had a bad experience would have made the effort to respond.

The Army Research Institute study entitled Young Single Soldiers and Relationships further validated the finding of non-discrimination. Their findings reported that there were few differences between single soldier groups and those who were married regarding high community satisfaction (eg. recreational programs and services).⁴²

Given the foregoing, discrimination in the area of community life activities as defined by this paper can not be substantiated. However, there still is the perception among many that it does exist - this continues to be a source of irritation with local BOSS program forums. A large part of this perception may stem from the fact that "singles" have a tendency to want to "escape" from the authoritative environment of the post or installation on week nights and weekends. They may not make a conscience effort to actively solicit or use many of the

services available to them. Another interesting and related finding by the Army Research Institute was that as uncommitted single soldiers became involved with "significant others," their use and satisfaction with community services increased.⁴³

Several actions can be taken to correct this dilemma at both local and DA levels. First, at the local level, installation MWR program personnel must approach their recreational programming from a marketing perspective. Program selections should be oriented on the target population intended. One problem is that the MWR staff is at times older and out of sync with the younger single soldier. Secondly, the information has to reach the intended participants, particularly in lower unit levels. The information may be filtered by lower and mid level leadership in a way that it never reaches the soldier or gets there too late. Or, information may be thrown out with the "junk mail" at the unit level. Selective communication can be a "by word" when it comes to what the leadership feels is essential for the soldier to know or do. To close the loop on programs and services available, there must be a simple feedback mechanism between the units and MWR programming staff personnel.

At the DA level, there is the need for an institutionalized mechanism to monitor Army-wide progress in community life activities as they relate to the single population. Research from private industry has indicated that the most feasible way to measure this type activity is through the use of carefully designed questionnaires.⁴⁴ The Army can utilize the existing

semi-annual soldier survey as the implementing instrument or a modification of this survey for feedback. From this world-wide input, modifications to policy and program guidance can be made by DA for installation staff MWR programming adjustments.

Compensation....

After examining pay and compensation literature, there is in fact inequities in these policies. However, this can not be considered a sinister inequity or one that has been deliberately designed to discriminate against the single soldier. In all reality, the military pay and compensation system is based on a balance between "doing what's right for the soldier" and hard economics.

The current military compensation system is based on an institutional model which recognizes that the needs of married soldiers are greater than those of single soldiers. The Army also understands that families have a direct say in a soldier's decision to remain for a full military career (study has shown that 80 percent of soldiers' decision to stay in was based on family considerations).⁴⁵ Given these considerations, the Army policy is that dependency must be accommodated to retain quality soldiers and leaders. The fact that single soldiers receive less in allowances may be an irritant but has had no bearing on retention. An additional consideration is that a large number of those who do choose to remain on active duty do so with the expectation of eventually being married and therefore will become

proponents for a dependency system they were once against. This unfortunately is a two edge sword. On the one hand, it may well reward the single soldier to marry earlier and start a family and on the other hand, it may act as an inducement to remain in service because of the human nature to make decisions based on expectations; the expectation being that with time, pay and benefits will get better. A second consideration is that according to the national income average for new high school graduates entering the work force, an initial term enlistee in the Army receives a higher salary (including in-kind benefits) than his contemporary in the civilian sector.

Given the above situation, there are several alternatives that can be considered to provide equity in compensation across the board. First, the Army could raise the single soldiers' allowances to that of his or her married counterparts. It would not be feasible to reduce the former because of the financial difficulty facing married couples in the lower enlisted ranks and the already 10.0 to 12.0 percent pay differential with the civilian sector.⁴⁶ Considering the severe DoD budget decrements programmed by congressional mandate, allowance increases for single soldiers, absent recruiting and retention problems, would be difficult if not impossible to justify to the United States Congress.

A second alternative would be for the Army to abandon dependency as a pay determinant altogether and move to strictly a salary system. Although this sounds simple and straightforward

at the outset, it becomes very complex when retirement outlays are also figured in as part of the equation. Retirement pay for the armed forces is computed as a percentage of base pay and not allowances. If the salary system were to be used, a number of separate allowances would have to be incorporated into base pay to provide the soldier the same standard of living. This would escalate retirement costs dramatically because of the overall increase in salaries to make up for the loss of allowances. A second and more subtle consideration is that allowances for the most part are tax free because they are monetary entitlement in lieu of goods and services in-kind. These are things that the government should have provided in-kind, but can not or will not. The soldier receives a tax break by accepting the allowances. The bottom line is that if the Army adopted a salary system it would create a lose/lose situation. The government would lose because of higher retirement outlays which would be unpopular with Congress, and the soldier would lose what little tax advantages he or she may have. A preliminary estimate by Pentagon compensation officials put the cost of going to a salary system at an extra 3 billion per year for just the enlisted ranks. This alternative as with the first is cost prohibitive and politically unsound.

A third and final consideration is to review the retirement system itself. This consideration would require unlinking retirement from base pay completely and adaptation of a contributory system such as that used by private enterprise.

Soldiers would contribute a capped percentage of pay each month with the government matching with an equal amount. A spin off of this could also be a "cafeteria style" benefits program where the soldier, based on the best available package for his or her needs, selects a package plan. This plan would include an associated cost ceiling per soldier and would apply equally to both single and married soldiers.

In summary, we can talk about "equal job, equal rank, equal pay" but from the economics of today's budget constraints and the present political environment, the current system can no longer remain both affordable and equitable without major modifications.

Other Soldier Policies....

Other soldier policies cover three primary areas of single soldier discontent - billets policy, inspection policy and extra/after duty requirements. The literature review substantiated in all cases that there is inequity in these areas. They continue to be a recurring topic of discussion at Family Action Plan Planning Committee symposiums, Inspector General sensing sessions and BOSS Program forums. As an example, in the Walter Reed Institute of Research study it was determined that the single soldier does not see billets as his turf or castle in which he can tend to his own needs.⁴⁷ Rather, it is an arena of threat because of the arbitrary after duty knock on the door with corresponding evening work detail or unannounced inspection. Many of the single soldier concerns are keyed to this pattern of

undisciplined and capricious control of space and time by leaders. Some leaders often go so far as to arbitrarily dictate the contents and arrangement of the room with little or no soldier input. In units where such arbitrary assaults on the soldiers' psychological sense of private and personal time take place, soldiers are jealous of their comparatively immune married peers and may be prone to marry to escape what they consider harassment and unfair treatment. Recent studies show that military personnel at the age of 22 are twice as likely to be married as their civilian counterparts.⁴⁸ While barracks conditions can not be held as the only determinant, they certainly provide a strong influence. Given the above, the solution should not be to make being married more appealing but to make being single more reasonable and predictable in terms of organizational demands and expectations.

CONCLUSIONS

The issues involved in this study are many and emotional with perceptions and reality sometimes at a variance. While progress has been made in many areas of single soldier inequity, there is still an absence of Department of the Army strategic planning and vision for single soldier policies and programs. The development and implementation of loosely organized programs has yet to strike at the heart of the dilemma - a persistent but still unanswered plea for a single soldier voice in policy agenda which impacts their lives and welfare.

Although inroads have been made at incorporating single soldier issues and interests into a variety of symposiums and forums, most, if not all, have shortfalls in terms of credible representation of the intended population, retention of issue visibility, and championship at the senior leadership levels. Even though in recent years the DCSPER has taken steps in the right direction, there still is an absence of a viable "single soldier" program with definable goals and objectives which can be accurately measured in terms of benefits and equity. Added to this dilemma has been the obvious reluctance of Department of the Army to institutionalize any form of meaningful guidance on Army wide inspection and barracks policies other than "leaving it to the discretion" of the commander. This has been interpreted by some as a denial and refusal to deal with single soldier issues.⁴⁹

Token and well meaning efforts have also been made at providing the single soldier an agenda platform to voice his or her concerns. Unfortunately, this has further exacerbated the problem by deepening the single soldiers' frustration with a system that is losing their confidence. This system, in their opinion, has promulgated policies and programs that encourage marriage by financial incentives and quality of life enhancements.

RECOMMENDATIONS SUMMARY

While there is no "silver bullet" for solving the single

soldier dilemma, a beginning should be the formal establishment of a viable proponency; this would include (1) appropriate reallocation resources, (2) a clearly delineated role, and (3) explicit functions with which to address and coordinate single soldier issues. The result would be the elimination of the current diffused and disjointed efforts at "farming out" issues to various directorates and offices within the DCSPER and CFSC community. A single staff proponency would provide the "one stop" focal point for Army Staff and field inquiries into singles' issues. It would also establish a "one voice" communications conduit to Senior Army leadership versus the multichannel forums and symposiums transmitting mixed signals and agendas.

Second, in support of the first recommendation, existing programs, forums, and symposiums must be effectively integrated and coordinated to maximize issue input and responses to that input. The BOSS program forum and the Family Action Plan Planning Committee symposium would be two key vehicles in doing this. The DA FAPPC would continue to function as designed, a "Total Army Family" conduit for elevating difficult problems, including single soldier issues, that can not be solved at levels below DA. However, to do this, while still protecting the interests of single soldiers, a stronger, more equitable and better informed representation by singles is required in the DA FAPPC process. To provide this stronger and more equitable representation, a review and adjustment of FAPPC participation

would be required. This would ensure that participation matched all "representative" populations in the total Army. A better informed singles' representation could be accomplished with several small but vital modifications to the existing systems. The BOSS program could be organized to closely mirror the functions of the installation and MACOM Family Action Plan Planning symposiums by identifying and developing singles' issues to be addressed at the DA FAPPC. This would require the establishment of a BOSS program at the MACOM level or as a minimum , a coordination point at that level. The BOSS program forums could also act as a resource pool in providing seasoned and issue astute participants to the DA FAPPC. This would act to increase DA FAPPC familiarity and knowledge of key singles' issues. Finally, the single soldier staff proponent would tie in by having the responsibility for tracking single soldier issues throughout their life cycle and providing feedback to the field.

Third, there still exists the need for Army wide guidelines addressing barracks and inspection policies. The intent would not be to usurp the commanders' prerogatives but to assist them by providing guidelines with which to implement balanced and evenly enforceable policies and procedures. This would prevent the unreasonable, inconsistent, and restrictive policies implemented by some field commands. It would also provide a visible statement of the Army's continuing commitment and concern for the soldiers' dignity and welfare.

Fourth, a review of the Army pay system is needed to

investigate alternatives to the existing costly dependency system. This review must approach the subject from fresh perspectives unhampered by the present constraints of the retirement system. Because of the complexity and breath of this subject, it is not within the scope of this paper to outline specifics other than recommending broad alternatives such as a form of salary system or "cafeteria style" benefits system with an associated cost ceiling per soldier, whether married or single.

Lastly, while there is disagreement even among members of the senior leadership as to the severity of the dilemma, the problem nonetheless exists. Some leaders continue to remain "out of touch" because of a lack of knowledge while others, however few they may be, take initiative to correct as much as possible within statutory and regulatory limitations. A key in resolution of this dilemma is the implementation of an education process which will make Army leadership at all levels aware of single soldier concerns and needs in policy and programming. A portion of this is already under way through changes to appropriate Army publications.

These recommendations are neither resource intensive nor difficult to implement. They do not require diversions of resources from existing family member programs but do require adjustments in institutional attitudes and behavior. As we transition to a smaller Army, policies and programs must be kept under constant review and continually gaged for effectiveness as

well as balance between the diverse components of our Total Army Family. At no time in our military history, particularly with the rapidly changing world events, is it more important for soldiers to know, trust, and count on their leaderships' commitment to equality and well-being.

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